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A FRAGMENT OF A PAINTED PITHOS FROM CNOSSUS

SOUTH of the palace precinct at Cnossus there are several heaps of discarded potsherds which the English excavators generously put at the disposal of those interested. In cleaning and assorting some specimens which I recently procured in this way for the Archaeological Museum at Yale University,

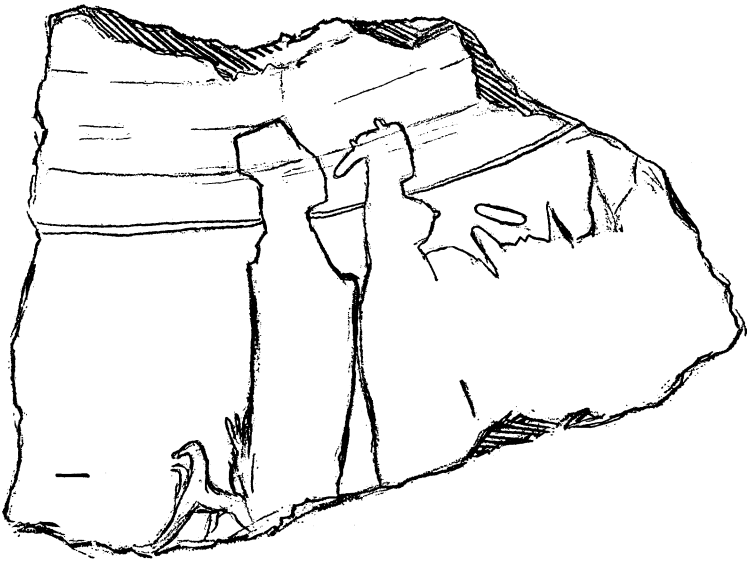


FIGURE 1. — FRAGMENT OF PITHOS FROM CNOSSUS.

I noticed that one of the fragments, which was handmade, was covered with stucco and still shows traces of painting. The clay is a dull red with a sprinkling of black specks. The fragment, which is 0.19 m. long, 0.12 m. high, and varying from 0.01 m. to 0.023 m. in thickness, still retains 0.01 m. of

the lip of the vase, otherwise it presents no smooth edge. A horizontal relief-band, 0.025 m. broad and projecting 0.005 m. at its highest point, encircled the vase 0.035 m. below the rim. Judging from the thickness and gradual curve of the fragment (see Fig. 2), the vase must have been a pithos.

From the accompanying outline sketch (Fig. 1), for which I am indebted to Mr. John D. Whiting, it is clear that two



FIGURE 2.—VERTICAL SECTION OF FRAGMENT.

female figures with their arms concealed in their long garments are walking to the right, approaching some plants. Their heads are painted on the relief-band, their feet are broken away. The first figure is 0.08 m., the second 0.09 m. high. They are roughly painted in silhouette without any details; not even the eyes are indicated. The slip is yellowish gray, the figures a dull brown and in some places black. The foremost figure represents the well-known Minoan type of goddess with exaggerated uncovered breasts, and wears a peculiar flat headdress which projects behind her head. An unknown object about the shape of a grain of wheat hovers in the air above the plants in front of her. The second goddess, who follows close behind the first, wears a high headdress similar to that of Eileithyia on the black-figured vase-paintings. She is accompanied by an animal, perhaps a lioness, to the left, lifting the right forepaw. There are no traces of other figures to the left, but let us hope that fragments of the same pithos may be found at Cnossus with figures to the right of the plants. Until then it will be difficult to attempt any explanation of the subject.

So far as I know, pre-Mycenaean pithoi with human figures painted on stucco have not been noticed by the excavators in Crete, but it is probable that on thorough examination other examples of this class of pottery will be brought to light.

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